

# NEW AMSTERDAM SINGERS

BEN ARENSEN, Music Director

**2025-2026 Season**



*Broadway Presbyterian Church  
114th Street and Broadway  
New York City*



# NEW AMSTERDAM SINGERS

Ben Arendsen, *Music Director*

T.J. Barnes, *Assistant Conductor*

Pen Ying Fang, *Piano*

## ***A Gift to Be Free***

The Peace of Wild Things

Jake Runestad

Pen Ying Fang, *Piano*

Full Chorus

To Be Free

Karen Siegel

Pen Ying Fang, *Piano*

if I am silent

David Lang

Michelle Neary, *Soprano*

American Dream

Jocelyn Hagen

Pen Ying Fang, *Piano*

Chamber Chorus

I Shall Not Live in Vain

Thomas LaVoy

T.J. Barnes, *Conductor*

Full Chorus

## **INTERMISSION**

Sometimes We Talk Past Each Other

Saunder Choi

Lisa Matricardi and Ragga Petursdottir, *Violin*

Carrie Frey, *Viola*

Zsaz Rutkowski, *Cello*

To the Hands

Caroline Shaw

*I. Prelude*

*II. in medio*

*III. Her beacon-hand beckons*

*IV. ever ever ever*

*V. Litany of the Displaced*

*VI. i will hold you*

Libby Fosmire, Bernardica Sculac Stern, Isabel Colman,

Ryan Kanarek, James Crowell, *Quintet*

Lisa Matricardi and Ragga Petursdottir, *Violin*

Carrie Frey, *Viola*

Zsaz Rutkowski, *Cello*

Wynter McCray, *Bass*

Full Chorus

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## ***A Gift to Be Free***

As we head into the summer in which our country will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, many arts organizations are finding ways to celebrate the freedoms we value, and the idea of freedom itself. We at New Amsterdam Singers are no exception.

This celebration comes with some irony; art in this country has seen censorship and a lack of support from its government at a level higher than any in my lifetime, and many in the performing arts are fearful of what may come in the immediate future. With this backdrop, it is tempting to become cynical, to look at the texts we have before us in today's concert and draw comparisons to what we are currently experiencing. But when I look at these pieces, though, at the texts made all the more vivid by the talented composers who gave them musical life, I find myself anything but cynical.

Freedom is, and always has been, an aspiration. It is a dream (American or otherwise) that we have always realized imperfectly, and strived to improve and make more real. That desire for realization is as important now as it was at our Declaration's signing, and as each piece explores a different aspect of what it means to be "free," I hope you will reflect on the gifts we as a people have been given, and how you can make that freedom more real for future generations.

### ***The Peace of Wild Things - Jake Runestad***

We begin our concert not with thoughts of political freedom, but rather the freedom that nature can provide for us. In Runestad's setting of Wendell Berry's beautiful poem, we see one who is affected by the world, set in an ominous minor key. Despair is relieved in the "peace of wild things," in the freedom of the natural world, those beings who "do not tax their lives with forethought of grief," moving to a major key filled with lush

and warming harmonies. This freedom is one I hope you all have been able to enjoy, as it is always there for us.

*When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night [at the least sound]  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

— Wendell Berry

## **To Be Free - Karen Siegel**

Next, we see the freedom to live our morals. *Simple Gifts* is a well-known tune from the Shaker community, famously set in Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring* a century ago. Composer Karen Siegel writes:

*This arrangement of Joseph Brackett's well-known Shaker song Simple Gifts draws on the Shakers' history as an immigrant group to the colonial United States with the addition of a new second verse and chorus. It emphasizes the second clause in the opening line, that it's a gift to be free, and it elaborates on the idea of being in "the place just right," expressing gratitude for our communities and emphasizing the importance of showing kindness to the newly arrived stranger. I have taken many rhythmic liberties with Brackett's song, in addition to fragmenting and layering the tune, but it is still recognizable as the song that is as quintessentially American as the idea of freedom itself.*

'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free,  
'Tis a gift to come down to where we ought to be.  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained,  
To bow and to bend we won't be ashamed.  
To turn, turn will be our delight,  
'Til by turning and turning we come around right

— Joseph Brackett, 1848  
Shaker dancing song

'Tis a gift to be grateful, 'tis a gift to be here,  
'Tis a gift to be loved by neighbors we hold dear.  
And when we stand up for what we know is right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

When true benevolence is shown,  
With strangers around, we won't be alone.  
To love, love will be our delight,  
'Til by loving and loving we come around right.

— Karen Siegel, 2018

## ***if I am silent* - David Lang**

From the ideas of freedom, we now see how one weighs the responsibility of freedom. In Lang's *if I am silent*, text is taken from the Hebrew Bible's Book of Esther. As the composer writes:

*At this point in the story, the Persian King Ahasuerus has made Esther his queen. Ahasuerus is persuaded to order the deaths of all the Jews in his kingdom, but he doesn't realize that Queen Esther is, herself, a Jew. At that moment Esther has a decision to make – does she keep quiet and save herself? Or does she risk her life and comfort to help her people?*

This is the choice that Esther is free to make, and, indeed, one that we are all free to make: do we sacrifice our comfort to aid a cause we believe in? In Lang's text, there is a hint of an answer: "Maybe everything I have, I have for such a time as this."

*If I am silent  
I cannot think  
that I will be saved  
if I am silent*

*If I am silent  
help will come  
from somewhere else  
but not for me  
if I am silent*

*everything I have  
everything I am  
everything I know  
everything I feel*

*maybe everything I have I have for such a time as this*

— David Lang  
after the Book of Esther

## **American Dream - Jocelyn Hagen**

Earlier this year, the chorus performed another composition of Hagen's based on the writings of Leonardo da Vinci. *American Dream* is something quite different in terms of style. The writing for both chorus and piano draws on harmonies and gestures that one equates with classic "American" sounds heard in everything from hymns to symphonies. Hagen composed this work for an event at Carnegie Hall for Choirs of America. Drawing on this backdrop, the composer writes:

*...I was inspired to write a piece that truly honors the people of the United States. The media wants us to believe that the American people are made up of two sides, polar opposites to each other, only interested in fighting. I don't believe that to be true. As an artist, collaboration is a huge part of my life. Every performance is a collaboration! And there is nothing like standing next to one another and singing. (We all have to agree to sing the right notes and the right rhythms, and stay together!) I commissioned this poem from my friend Julia Klatt Singer, who brought together all the beauty of the flowers across the United States into one bouquet, rich in color and diversity. This diversity should be celebrated, and we should honor the differences in each other. I believe that most Americans also believe this to be true. Singing this song will remind us of that truth.*

*Magnolias and bitterroot. Mountain laurel and wild prairie rose.  
Deep rooted, our first thoughts of light and land,  
we travel by wind and by sea.  
Follow rivers through banks and prairies, forests where trees  
live 300, 400 years. We are so young compared to these.*

*Sunflower, Saguaro cactus blossom, California poppy, Camellia.  
We love independence, sing of freedom, respect hard work, civility.  
We believe in equality. We have hope for each other, have hope  
for the future, have hope for you and for me.*

*Colorado blue columbine, orange blossom, Cherokee rose.  
This land is our mother,  
the bison and deer, rabbit, possum, bee and crow  
our sisters and brothers.*

*Northern flicker, wild turkey, willow ptarmigan, hummingbird and loon.  
Our differences,  
not our similarities,  
make us beautiful and strong.*

*We share our borders and our water, our love and our air.*

*So we start somewhere in the middle, work our way out,  
Work it out. For we are all neighbors, pioneers,  
for and of change.*

*Goldenrod, black-eyed Susan. Segoe lily, lady slipper.  
We are rich, every color  
of the sunrise, tender petals, hard and cool  
as the moon.*

*I bring you a bouquet of Dogwood, peony, violets and forget-me-nots.  
It is our similarities, not our differences we have walked arm in arm with,  
dreaming this American dream, all along.*

— Julia Klatt Singer

## ***I Shall Not Live in Vain - Thomas LaVoy***

The text for *I Shall Not Live in Vain* is Emily Dickinson's poem *If I can stop one heart from breaking*. This piece speaks to the freedom of service, of what we owe to one another. As ruggedly individualistic as Americans can be portrayed, our society simply doesn't work without the ethos of giving oneself to others. If we do it right, it means something profound.

LaVoy's setting of Dickinson's timeless words is as achingly beautiful as the text itself, weaving melodies in the choral parts with a pulsing accompaniment that serves almost as the music's heartbeat.

*If I can stop one heart from breaking,  
I shall not live in vain;  
If I can ease one life the aching,  
Or cool one pain,  
Or help one fainting robin  
Unto his nest again,  
I shall not live in vain.*

— Emily Dickinson

## **Sometimes We Talk Past Each Other - Saunder Choi**

In the pieces heard in the first half of the concert, themes rest largely on the aspirational nature of America and freedom. In Choi's *Sometimes We Talk Past Each Other*, we confront the polarization that has sadly taken hold in contemporary discourse. It is our freedom to engage in this way, but oftentimes to our personal and societal peril. The composer writes:

*Sometimes We Talk Past Each Other is a commentary on our inability and oftentimes unwillingness to hear perspectives that do not align with our own. We have become so polarized as a society that even when we do have conversations, it is a struggle to find a middle ground that everyone can agree on. Individual, unwavering opinions have become the hill we choose to die on.*

*Musically, I tried to represent "talking past each other" by textures that start homophonically but eventually fray apart from each other. The call and response between the choir and string quartet mimics a conversation, often echoing themes from each other that are recolored or reinterpreted — mirroring the fact that people from both sides often want the same thing but have vastly different approaches in trying to achieve it.*

*Sometimes we talk past each other*

*Other times it's the same.*

*Other times it's equal sounds*

*Other times it is round and round*

*Other times it's maybes*

*Other times amazed*

*Other times it's another time*

*Other times not made*

*Sometimes I wish your wishes were like mine*

*Finding another like our kind*

*Where we are from both sides  
Forgetting about the right times...*

*Sometimes we talk past each other  
Before a sound unfolds  
Let not this passing be a passing  
And be one of our soul.*

— James Patrick Satcher

## **To the Hands - Caroline Shaw**

In this breathtaking multi-movement work, Shaw masterfully weaves music and text in her unique and powerful voice. Using musical inspiration and quotation from Dietrich Buxtehude's 17<sup>th</sup>-century work *Ad manus* (literally "to the hands," meant to represent the wounds of Christ), the work is at times aspirational, at times inspirational, and at times searingly critical.

With Buxtehude's motet as a launching point, Shaw encapsulates, with music and words, much of the complicated legacy of America's promise of freedom for those who inhabit it. Using unique and unconventional vocal techniques and text sources, it is a piece of profound depth and inspiration. The composer has written the following on her work:

*To the Hands begins inside the 17<sup>th</sup>-century sound of Buxtehude. It expands and colors and breaks this language, as the piece's core considerations, of the suffering of those around the world seeking refuge, and of our role and responsibility in these global and local crises, gradually come into focus.*

*The prelude turns the tune of Ad manus into a wordless plainchant melody, punctured later by the strings' introduction of an unsettling pattern. The second movement fragments Buxtehude's choral setting of the central question,*

*"quid sunt plagae istae in medio manuum tuarum," or "what are these wounds in the midst of your hands?" It settles finally on an inversion of the question, so that we reflect, "What are these wounds in the midst of our hands?" We notice what may have been done to us, but we also question what we have done and what our role has been in these wounds we see before us.*

*The text that follows in the third movement is a riff on Emma Lazarus' sonnet The New Colossus, famous for its engraving at the base of the Statue of Liberty. The poem's lines "Give me your tired, your poor,/ Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" and its reference to the statue's "beacon-hand" present a very different image of a hand — one that is open, beckoning, and strong. No wounds are to be found there — only comfort for those caught in a dangerous and complex environment. While the third movement operates in broad strokes from a distance, the fourth zooms in on the map so far that we see the intimate scene of an old woman in her home, maybe setting the table for dinner alone. Who is she, where has she been, whose lives has she left? This simple image melts into a meditation on the words "in caverna" from the Song of Solomon, found in Buxtehude's fourth section, Ad latus.*

*In the fifth movement the harmony is passed around from one string instrument to another, overlapping only briefly, while numerical figures are spoken by the choir. These are global figures of internally displaced persons, by country, sourced from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) data reported in May 2015 (accessed on 20/03/2016 at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)). Sometimes data is the cruelest and most honest poetry.*

*The sixth and final movement unfolds the words "in caverna" into the tumbling and comforting promise of "ever ever" —*

*"ever ever will I hold you, ever ever will I enfold you." They could be the words of Christ, or of a parent or friend or lover, or even of a nation.*

Shaw's words have found, I believe, further resonance in the 10 years since this piece was written. The promise of a nation whose central tenet is freedom, particularly on the precipice of 250 years since its Declaration, invites careful and honest evaluation of what those freedoms are and mean. I hope that the beauty of the music you've heard today acts as a backdrop to that evaluation, and will enfold your thinking as we consider all that we have, and all that we rightly should celebrate and interrogate in equal measure.

## **I. Prelude**

*[no text—chorus on vowels only]*

### **II. in medio**

*quid sunt plagae istae  
quid sunt plagae istae  
in medio manuum tuarum  
in medio  
quid sunt plagae istae  
quid sunt plagae istae  
in medio manuumstrarum*

### **II. in the midst**

*what are those wounds  
what are those wounds  
in the midst of your hands  
in the midst  
what are those wounds  
what are those wounds  
in the midst of our hands*

— Zechariah 13:6  
*inspired by Buxtehude's Ad manus  
adapted and translated by Caroline Shaw*

## **III. Her beacon-hand beckons**

*Her beacon-hand beckons:  
give  
give to me  
those yearning to breathe free  
tempest-tossed they cannot see*

what lies beyond the olive tree  
whose branch was lost amid the pleas  
for mercy, mercy  
give  
give to me  
your tired fighters fleeing flying  
from the  
from the  
from  
let them  
i will be your refuge  
i will be your refuge  
i will be  
i will be  
we will be  
we will

— Caroline Shaw  
inspired by Emma Lazarus's *The New Colossus*

#### **IV. ever ever ever**

ever ever ever  
in the window sills or  
the beveled edges  
of the aging wooden frames that hold  
old photographs  
hands folded  
folded  
gently in her lap  
  
ever ever  
in the crevices  
the never-ending efforts of  
the grandmother's tendons tending  
to her bread and empty chairs  
left for Elijah  
where are they now

— Caroline Shaw

*in caverna [in the hollow]*  
*in caverna [in the hollow]*

— Buxtehude's *Ad latus*  
adapted and translated by Caroline Shaw

## **V. Litany of the Displaced**

[The chorus speaks global figures of internal displacement, sourced from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre in 2016. The numbers spoken are the numbers of internally displaced persons by country, in ascending order. These are people, some of whom may have legal refugee status, who have been displaced within their own country due to armed conflict, situations of generalized violence or violations of human rights.]

— Caroline Shaw

## **VI. i will hold you**

*i would hold you*  
*i would hold you*  
*ever ever will i hold you*  
*ever ever will i enfold you*

— Caroline Shaw

<i>in medio</i>	<i>in the midst</i>
<i>in medio</i>	<i>in the midst</i>
<i>in medio</i>	<i>in the midst</i>
<i>in medio</i>	<i>in the midst</i>
<i>in medio manuumstrarum</i>	<i>in the midst of our hands</i>

— Zechariah 13:6  
inspired by Buxtehude's *Ad manus*  
adapted and translated by Caroline Shaw

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# ***New Amsterdam Singers***

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Orren Alperstein  
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Dana Boocock  
    Crowell\*  
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Naomi Draper  
Libby Fosmire  
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Melina Cary  
Isabel Colman  
Rebecca Dee\*\*  
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Hsin Wang

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\*\*Chamber Chorus  
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## About the Artists

**New Amsterdam Singers**, now in its 58<sup>th</sup> year and led by newly appointed Music Director Ben Arendsen, is known for the breadth and variety of its repertoire. Specializing in a *cappella* and double-chorus works, the chorus sings music ranging from the 16th century through contemporary pieces, including many it has commissioned. Recent commissions include *L'Abécédaire de Huon, Roi de Cambrai* by Philip Lasser (2025), *Charting the World* by Dale Trumbore (2023), and *I Go Among Trees* by Robert Paterson (2021). NAS co-commissioned Michael Dellaira's folk opera *Arctic Explorations* with the cell theatre and performed its world premiere in March 2024; the recording of the performance is now available through Naxos Records.

In addition to works by Carol Barnett, Lisa Bielawa, and Ben Moore commissioned for the group's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017, recent world premieres include compositions by Matthew Harris, Paul Alan Levi, and Elizabeth Lim. American and New York City premieres in the previous decade included works by Einojuhani Rautavaara, Matthew Harris, Abbie Betinis, Steven Stucky, Kirke Mechem, Steven Sametz, Kitty Brazelton, Clare Maclean, Alex Weiser, Sheena Phillips, and Judith Shatin. In 2016 NAS performed Frank Martin's oratorio *Golgotha* with professional orchestra and soloists as guests of Trinity Church Wall Street under the direction of Music Director Emeritus Clara Longstreth, the first time the work was heard in New York City in over 60 years.

NAS has performed with the New York Philharmonic under Leonard Bernstein, at Alice Tully Hall as a guest of Clarion Concerts, and with the American-Russian Youth Orchestra under Leon Botstein at Tanglewood and Carnegie Hall. NAS appeared twice with Anonymous 4 in Richard Einhorn's *Voices of Light* — in 1999 at Avery Fisher Hall with Concordia Orchestra under Marin Alsop, and in 2006 at the Winter Garden of the

World Financial Center with Ensemble Sospeso under David Hattner, for broadcast on WYNC's *New Sounds*.

NAS has also appeared internationally; the chorus has sung at the Heraklion Festival in Greece; the Granada Festival in Spain; the International Choral Festival at Międzyzdroje, Poland; the Festival of the Algarve in Portugal; Les Chorégies d'Orange in France; and the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod in Wales. The chorus has also performed in Turkey, Scandinavia, Croatia, Spain, Argentina and Uruguay, Cuba, South Africa, Greece, Iceland, Denmark, and Bulgaria.

**Ben Arendsen, Music Director**, assumed the NAS baton in July 2025 from Maestra Clara Longstreth, our founding Music Director, who led NAS for 57 seasons. An experienced conductor, Ben is currently an Associate Professor and Director of Choral Activities at Nassau Community College, where he also teaches voice, guitar, sight singing, and music history.

Ben has served as music director of several choral ensembles, including the Forest Hills Choir and Great Neck Choral Society, and as a conductor and facilitator for C4/The Choral Composer/Conductor Collective. As an orchestral conductor, Ben served as Music Director for Metropolitan Youth Orchestra, the Gilbert and Sullivan Light Opera Company of Long Island, and Sound Symphony, and has served as guest conductor of numerous choruses and orchestras.

In addition to choral and orchestral conducting, Ben has extensive experience as a guitarist, and has performed in venues throughout the NYC area, including Carnegie Hall, Symphony Space, and BAM. Ben also enjoys singing with the eVoco Voice Collective and serving as a judge for young singers in New York State's NYSSMA festival. Ben holds degrees in Music Education and Conducting from the Aaron Copland School of Music at CUNY-Queens College, and the Berklee College of Music.

**T.J. Barnes, Assistant Conductor**, a native of Buffalo, NY, is an NYC-based conductor, educator, performer, pianist, and arranger. He is the Director of Music at Flushing High School, where he revived and developed programs in Chorus, Piano, Guitar, and Music Appreciation.

T.J. holds a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance and a graduate certificate in K-12 Music Education from the Aaron Copland School of Music at CUNY-Queens College.

Performance credits include Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte* at Queens College and Joe Hardy in *Damn Yankees* at the Kupferberg Center of the Arts. He also served as Music Director of the Queens College iTones, a coeducational *a cappella* group, for whom he wrote numerous pop SATB arrangements, including their award-winning set at the 2019 ICCA Northeast Regional Semifinal Championships.

T.J. is a recipient of the first Maurice Peress Memorial Award in conducting and the American Choral Directors Association's 2019 Next Direction Collegiate Leadership Award.

**Pen Ying Fang, Accompanist**, is celebrating her 26th year as NAS's accompanist. She has performed widely in the New York and Philadelphia metropolitan areas, building an extensive repertoire of solo and chamber music. Currently, she serves as a coach and accompanist at Westminster Choir College, where she has worked with many prominent artists and renowned voice programs such as the CoOPERative summer program and the Florence Voice Seminar in Italy. As an accompanist, Pen Ying has also performed and toured with several choirs from the New York area, in which capacity *The New York Times* has praised her performances as "vivid" and "deft." In 2018 she was honored to be a featured performer in a Philip Glass opera workshop in North Adams, MA.

Pen Ying is a native of Taiwan, where she began studying piano at age five and attended an experimental music-focused grade

school until moving to the United States. Here she studied with Paul Hoffmann and Barbara Gonzalez-Palmer, earning Bachelor and Master of Music degrees in Piano at Rutgers University.

**Stefanie Izzo, Manager**, is a classically trained soprano, educator, nonprofit administrator, and longtime resident of Queens, NY. She received a Master of Arts in vocal performance from the Aaron Copland School of Music at CUNY-Queens College and a Bachelor of Music from NYU. Stefanie has been hailed as possessing a “gorgeously rich and full sound” for her work in opera and musical theater, in roles such as Adina in *L'Elisir d'Amore*, Anne Truelove in *The Rake's Progress*, Maria in *West Side Story* and Mozart heroines Pamina, Susanna, and Despina.

In addition to operatic repertoire, Stefanie devotes a significant amount of her performance time to art song, particularly that of women composers, and maintains an active concert schedule in the NYC area. She is a frequent collaborator with living composers, and is a co-founder of the chamber ensemble The Astoria Music Project. Stefanie is the Manager of Education Partnerships at the Metropolitan Opera.

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T.J. Barnes, *Assistant Conductor*  
Pen Ying Fang, *Accompanist*  
Stefanie Izzo, *Manager*

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New Amsterdam Singers  
P.O. Box 373  
Cathedral Station  
New York, NY 10025  
[info@nasingers.org](mailto:info@nasingers.org)  
[www.nasingers.org](http://www.nasingers.org)



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Laila Williamson  
Sally Zwiebach

‡Maestro's Circle for our  
Spring Benefit

\*\*In memory of Sally  
Hoskins

^^In memory of Sally  
Hoskins & Bendix  
Anderson

\*In honor of Robert  
Palmer

\*In honor of Susan  
Perkins

‡In honor of Dr. Richard  
Smoker

^In honor of Donna  
Zalichin

^-In honor of Robin  
Beckhard

++In memory of Spencer  
Carr

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### ***Watch & Listen Online***

Visit [www.nasingers.org](http://www.nasingers.org) for the latest chorus news, recordings, and videos. You can also see the many commissions and premieres that New Amsterdam Singers has been proud to present (hover over "Music" and click on "What We Sing").

### ***Sing With Us!***

New Amsterdam Singers invites singers with choral experience and sight-reading ability in all voice parts to audition for us. The Full Chorus rehearses Tuesday evenings at Broadway Presbyterian Church, and the Chamber Chorus rehearses on alternate Wednesdays at another Upper West Side location. Email [info@nasingers.org](mailto:info@nasingers.org) to arrange an audition.

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